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# Human trafficking

## Law enforcement says it's a problem, but stats lacking

By JENNY MICHAEL  
Bismarck Tribune

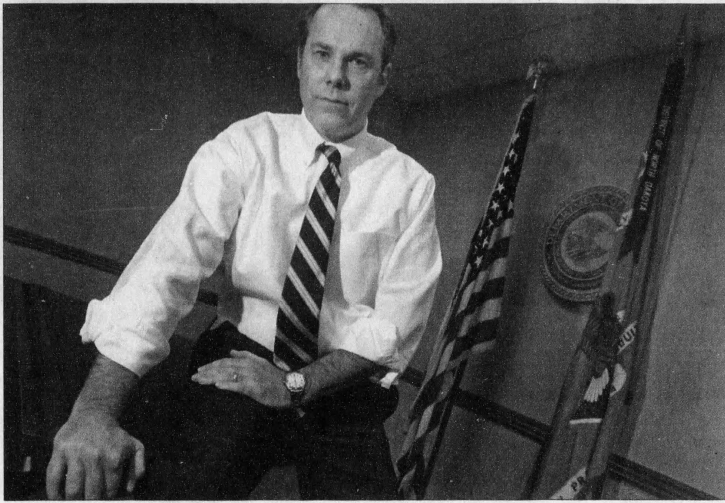
Law enforcement and public safety officials in North Dakota have been talking about human trafficking for the past few years, but the reality of the situation has been elusive. Statistics aren't available yet to back up the problem, nor are details plentiful.

Human trafficking refers to the sale or trade of humans — basically, slavery. Or as Patrick Atkinson, founder of the God's Child Project and the Institute for Trafficked, Exploited and Missing Persons, puts it, "the exploitation of the weak by the powerful."

Defining the problem is difficult, because it can take so many forms. Parents sell their children for drugs or money. Young girls are lured into the sex trade by offers of money, possessions or love. Women are kidnapped and forced into prostitution. Immigrants are pushed into low- or no-pay jobs at the threat of having their immigration statuses revealed to authorities.

Neither sex trafficking or labor trafficking are exactly new in North Dakota. Both have occurred throughout history. The trafficking that people are worried about taking root in North Dakota now is of the kind where people — mostly young girls and women — are coerced or forced into prostitution.

U.S. Attorney Tim Purdon said North Dakota — and particularly the booming western North Dakota oilfields — has become a target for organized crime, as shown by an increase in drug arrests with close connections to gangs and drug cartels. Prostitution arrests also have increased, though in



MIKE McCLEARY/Tribune

U.S. Attorney Tim Purdon, like others in law enforcement agencies in North Dakota, is trying to find the best way to combat human trafficking in the state.

**"We have been getting anecdotal information and reports in our communities about young girls and young boys being trafficked in North Dakota, and this is of great concern to us."**

Karen Van Fossan, communications director for Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota

most cases no immediate line has been drawn connecting the women arrested to pimps, gangs or others who may have forced them into service.

But where there is prostitution, there almost always is human trafficking. Where

there is a demand, someone will try to fill it.

"Somebody has a desire; somebody else will present a product to meet that desire and price accordingly," Atkinson said.

He said trafficking often follows the boom of an eco-

nomic industry, which pulls people, often young men, into a new place and provides an excess of money and time and a dearth of available female partners. Traffickers also look for places with a ready supply of vulnerable girls. In those

ways, western North Dakota fits the bill.

### Internet sex trade

North Dakota Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem said the advent of the Internet — and websites set up almost entirely to support the sex trade — has helped keep human trafficking off the radar and hard to track.

"It can be easier, in many respects, to make arrangements for meeting," he said. Even without statistics or concrete examples, most people agree there is little doubt human trafficking is

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# Legislation seeks to help victims of sex trafficking

By JENNY MICHAEL  
Bismarck Tribune

Escaping the bondage of sex trafficking can be difficult because of controlling pimps, economic insecurity and fear of arrest. A piece of federal legislation would begin to address the issues, at least for juvenile victims.

Federal law already prohibits the prostitution of children and considers them victims, since they cannot consent to being prostituted. However, not all state laws are in line with

that thinking.

Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., and others have sponsored a bill to require states to treat minors involved in commercial sex acts as victims. States without such "safe harbor" provisions would risk losing some federal funding. The bill is in committee.

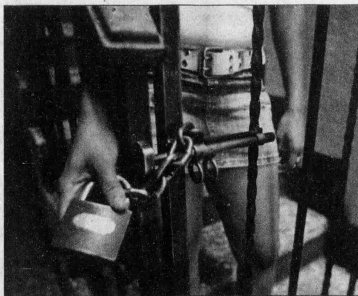
Heitkamp said she and Klobuchar, both former prosecutors, understand the importance of getting cooperation from victims by helping them.

Such "safe harbor" laws already are in place in several states, including Minnesota, Ramsey County, Minn., Attorney John Choi said when law enforcement there arrested prostitutes, including juveniles, it was difficult or impossible to get information valuable in prosecuting traffickers.

"That doesn't work for the victim," he said of the arrests. "They never really trust you."

"It is not enough to rescue someone and send

Continued on 10A



Submitted photo

A photo depicting an adolescent girl locked behind a barred staircase is one of the several visual aids and information the God's Child Project uses in its presentations dealing with human trafficking.

## Keystone foes are undaunted by report

By GRANT SCHULTE  
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — With yet another obstacle removed for the Keystone XL pipeline, opponents were pressing forward with a lawsuit to challenge the project, public protests and an effort to inject the issue into the November elections.

Supporters and opponents both were quick to claim victories with the U.S. State Department report released Friday, which raised no major objections to the pipeline. The oil industry, some union groups and congressional Republicans called on the Obama administration to move forward with the project, while a coalition of landowners and environmentalists say there is still cause for denying a federal permit. The project would ship 830,000 barrels of oil a day from Canada to Texas Gulf Coast refineries.

Meanwhile, farmers and ranchers in Nebraska who oppose the pipeline are planning to run for seats on a state board that regulates power stations that are needed along the project route. And national activists say they have recruited more than 75,000 volunteers willing to participate in civil disobedience, should President Barack Obama approve the Keystone project.

The project now goes to a 30-day comment period and a review by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and other agencies. Obama has 90 days to make the decision on the pipeline, but the White House on Friday disputed the notion that the report is headed to a fast approval. Oil began flowing last week through an Oklahoma-to-Texas section already approved by Obama.

"There's no question, if the president approves this permit, that there will be civil disobedience," said Jane Kleeb, executive director of the group Bold Nebraska, which has helped organize opposition in the state. "We've said from the beginning that we will support the landowners and what they want to do and what they think is best for their property. I think you'll see some landowners driving really slow on their county roads to block the (pipeline) trucks."

Project backers said the report — the latest in a five-year review by state

Continued on 10A

### Moving elephants

Ivory Coast pilots a novel rescue of endangered forest elephants — 2A

### N.D. interns

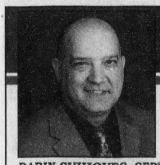
Programs help businesses seeking interns — 1B



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# Punxsutawney Phil's day coincides with Super Bowl

PUNXSUTAWNEY, Pa. (AP) — Groundhog Day coincides with the Super Bowl for the first time, but Punxsutawney Phil's peeps don't expect the big game to steal his early morning spotlight.

Rather, the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club expects about 20,000 revelers to gather around Gobbler's Knob when western Pennsylvania's world-famous rodent emerges from his lair just after dawn today to "predict" the weather, said executive director Katie Donald.

"We really don't think it will be too much of a factor for us because Phil does his prognostication so early in the morning and people have all day to get to wherever they're going to watch it that evening," McDonald said.

The closest the game has come to coinciding with Groundhog Day was in 2009, when the just-down-the-road Pittsburgh Steelers defeated the Arizona Cardinals 27-23 in the Super Bowl, the night before Phil's forecast.

Sunday night's game featuring the Seattle Seahawks and Denver Broncos at MetLife Stadium in East



Rutherford, N.J., will be the Super Bowl's 48th installment, while Phil has been predicting the weather since 1986.

Legend has it that if the animal sees his shadow, winter will last for six weeks. If cloudy conditions pre-

vent that, an early spring is forecast.

Phil has now seen his shadow 100 times and hasn't seen it just 17 times, according to the Groundhog Club's Inner Circle, the top-hatted gents who handle the animal

and translate his forecast. There are no records from many of the early years.

The folks' celebration typically attracts about 10,000 revelers when it falls on a weekday, but organizers expect twice as many to attend the

weekend event. Groundhog-related festivities begin Friday in the borough about 65 miles northeast of Pittsburgh and continue all weekend.

The tradition is rooted in a German superstition that says if a hibernating animal casts a shadow on Feb. 2, the Christian holiday of Candlemas, winter will last six more weeks.

The National Weather Service is forecasting typical weather for this time of year, an overcast day with a high temperature of 31 degrees and a low of 19, which is expected about the time Phil emerges for his prediction.

Last year, a prosecutor from neighboring Ohio light-heartedly filed a criminal indictment against Phil for fraudulently predicting an early spring.

Phil's handlers, the Inner Circle, took the blame, saying they mistranslated his forecast, so the prosecutor relented with a pardon. In actuality, the forecast is about as real as Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy: The Inner Circle conjures up the prediction in advance and only pretends to receive it from the animal.

## Human trafficking

happening, Tim Hathaway and Karen Van Fossan, the executive director and communications director, respectively, for Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota, said reports abound from around the state.

"We have been getting anecdotal information and reports in our communities about young girls and young boys being trafficked in North Dakota, and this is of great concern to us," Van Fossan said. She said people in Williams County have reported seeing what appears to be people trafficked in hotels and motels, and she has spoken to a woman who explained how she was trafficked in Bismarck as a teen.

Stenehjem said there are estimates of 45,000 trafficking victims in the country. "You can be assured we have our share," he said, adding that the problem is not just one of western North Dakota. "It happens statewide."

Still, ways of defining the problem and its scope remain elusive.

Minnesota faced the problem

Minnesota has been there, Ramsey County, Minn., Attorney John Choi said human trafficking was a conversation piece in Minnesota's Twin Cities for at least a decade before anyone realized the scope of the problem. Part of the problem was that the prostitutes police would encounter were unwilling to give truthful information, because the prostitutes themselves were in fear of being arrested. Even trying to use prosecution as leverage was ineffective, Choi said.

Purdon's office has prosecuted only one person

under the federal human trafficking statute in which there was an identifiable victim. In that case, investigators looked into reports of a home where teenage girls were provided alcohol and drugs and men would have sex with the intoxicated girls. The reports included mention of possible gang activities and markings. Four people eventually were indicted, including Dustin Morsette.

Morsette was convicted in April 2012 of one count of sex trafficking by force or coercion and a litany of other sex, drug and tampering charges. U.S. District Judge Daniel Hovland sentenced him to 45 years in prison.

That was a groundbreaking deal, Purdon said of the prosecution, led by Assistant U.S. Attorney Rick Volk.

The goal, Purdon said, is to make sure the Morsette case sends a message to other people who may be considering cashing in on the apparent demand for people forced into prostitution.

"Don't traffic here," Purdon said.

There have been a handful of cases in state court under a law passed in 2009. Several cases of a human trafficking nature have been prosecuted under other laws, both federally and in state court. Other cases, many of which are pending in court, have involved law enforcement officials posing as someone offering an underage person for sex, then arresting the people who show up for sexual encounters.

Those recent strings — involving federal and state law enforcement officers — showed Purdon that there was, indeed, demand for sex

trafficking in the state. Such strings netted three arrests in Williston, followed by 11 in Dickinson.

"It was an eye opener for me," Purdon said. "That was alarming."

### 3-prong approach

Purdon said his office is taking a three-pronged approach to combating sex trafficking. The first prong is to treat the people trafficked as victims, rather than arresting them for prostitution. The second prong is to attack the demand and prosecute the men who seek to hire trafficking victims. The third, and most difficult prong, is going after the traffickers.

The approach is, at least in part, based on that taken by Choi and other Minnesota officials. In 2011, Choi and other county attorneys in the Twin Cities area decided to try a new approach to human trafficking. Rather than treat the prostitutes as criminals, they would treat them as victims of trafficking, especially in the cases of children and teenagers. Instead of handcuffs, they offered services and help. And, in time, they started finding out how the victims came into the sex trade, and they gathered enough evidence to prosecute pimps for trafficking.

Because of the effort, Minnesota knows a lot about the trafficking problem in its state. Choi said his office continues to break its previous records for sentencing in human trafficking cases. The state has put money into providing services for juveniles — most of whom are girls — who are pushed into the sex trade, and private sector groups have worked on research and educating the public.

Purdon had Choi speak

at his office's annual meeting in December and offer some advice about how to approach human trafficking prosecutions, which can be daunting cases that are hard to hold together. Choi said he's heartened to see the North Dakota take on human trafficking, since it's a problem that often crosses jurisdictional boundaries. He's glad to lend a hand in showing them how to proceed in investigating and prosecuting the cases.

Battling public perception also is part of the problem, too. Choi said many people have a vision of prostitution based on the movie "Pretty Woman" and believe it's a victimless, consensual relationship. In reality, it's often a young, vulnerable girl with mental health or addiction issues pushed into a situation over which she has no control, he said.

Hathaway and Choi said traffickers have an ability to zoom in on the most vulnerable kids — the ones who might have disorganized family structures, who fend for themselves, or who exhibit a need for attention. Tribal leaders have expressed concerns about their young people falling victim, since there are many vulnerable youth on reservations, Purdon and Hathaway said.

All that means is that the "prostitutes" usually are powerless once they get sucked into the situation. Atkinson said they also are likely to fall victim to other crimes because of their lifestyle, including assaults both physical and sexual.

"It's an ugly, ugly life," Atkinson said about prostitution.

(Reach Jenny Michael at 701-250-8225 or jenny.michael@bismarcktribune.com.)

## Legislation

Continued from 1A

them on their way," North Dakota Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem agreed.

The federal bill also would create a national strategy to combat human trafficking, allow trafficking victims to participate in Job Corps, help victims pursue restitution from traffickers, require tighter monitoring of known traffickers as part of the National Sex Offender Registry, and strengthen the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

Heitkamp said the bill would steer victims toward social services and rehabilitation programs rather than put them in the criminal justice system.

Choi said Minnesota's law has set up such programs, which enable victims to find housing, get into rehabilitation programs and take control of their lives.

"That has allowed for a totally different result in terms of the ability for the victims to be courageous and tell their stories," he said.

Efforts to enact something similar to Minnesota's law are not limited to the federal level. State legislators already are trying to find the best approach for North Dakota for the 2015 Legislature.

North Dakota passed a human trafficking law in 2009. However, the Polaris Project, an anti-human trafficking organization, has given the state a low ranking for its laws. The organization faulted the state for not addressing asset forfeiture, not offering training for law enforcement, not having a human trafficking task force, not putting a human trafficking hotline, not having safe harbor for child victims, not offering victim assistance, not having civil remedies for victims and not vacating convictions of victims.

"That 'D' on the report card is one of those things that signal that we need more resources, more understanding on the issue," Tim Hathaway, executive director of Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota, said.

Rep. Gail Mooney, D-Cummings, said she and other legislators are working on finding a way to make programs that have worked in other states fit North Dakota.

"We don't want North Dakota to be this beacon that says it's OK for them to come here," Mooney said. She has been to Minnesota and met with officials, including Choi, who have been involved in the fight. But she hopes to study other states' laws and approaches as well, and talk to the people already involved in North Dakota.

Stenehjem said he has been involved with the coalition. He believes the lessons of past battles fought by law enforcement in the state — including against methamphetamines, prescription drugs and synthetic drugs — have shown what is needed: strong statutes, trained and dedicated law enforcement, and rehabilitative resources.

Heitkamp also advocates getting on board with a single strategy to attack human trafficking. The legislation she is behind is only one step.

"This bill is a good first step, but it's not the end," she said.

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### 'Her,' 'Phillips' win Writers Guild

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Spike Jonze's "Her" and Billy Ray's "Captain Phillips" have earned top screenplay honors from the Writers Guild of America.

Winning the prize for original screenplay on Saturday was "Her," Jonze's futuristic exploration of a man's relationship with his computer. The victor of the guild's adapted screenplay went to Ray for "Captain Phillips," the Somali pirate saga.

## Pet store owner arrested in fire; puppies saved

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Fire officials say a Las Vegas pet store owner is accused of setting her business ablaze, but all 28 puppies inside have been rescued.

Clark County Fire Department spokesman John Steinbeck said 35-year-old Gloria Lee was booked into the county jail on suspicion of first-degree arson after the fire early Monday morning at the Prince and Princess Puppy Boutique.

Steinbeck said in a statement issued early Saturday that the 28 puppies could have died if the sprinkler system hadn't activated and firefighters hadn't quickly extinguished the flames.

He said the fire caused \$100,000 in damage to the building, but the motive was not immediately clear. No people were injured.

County animal control officers took possession of the dogs.

## Keystone

and federal agencies — bolsters their case for the pipeline and eliminates the need for further delays.

The Keystone XL is "not about energy versus the environment. It's about where Americans want to get their oil," said Russ Girling, CEO of pipeline developer TransCanada. "Keystone XL will displace heavy oil from such places as the Middle East and Venezuela, and of the top five regions the U.S. imports oil from, only Canada has substantial greenhouse gas regulations in place."

Opponents were planning to host vigils throughout the nation Monday and "pipeline meet-ups" throughout February to encourage people to raise the issue with candidates in the 2014 election. They also were waiting for a Nebraska judge to rule on a lawsuit challenging a state law that allowed the project to proceed. A ruling is expected by late March, and whatever the outcome an appeal to the Nebraska Supreme

Court is a near certainty.

Kleeb said 115 landowners in Nebraska still refuse to sign agreements with pipeline developer TransCanada and would engage in nonviolent civil disobedience if the company tries to lay pipe through their land. She said her group also plans to run candidates for the Nebraska Public Power District, a state board that approves and regulates power projects.

The district plans to construct a 115,000-volt transmission line to support a pumping station that would be used for the Keystone XL. District officials have said they can't discriminate against customers, but Kleeb said candidates will challenge the pipeline while promoting more alternative energies in Nebraska.

"We will make sure folks know that we have not gone away, that we are still fighting this pipeline," Kleeb said. Many opponents have turned their hopes to Nebraska, where a group of farmers and ranchers have

joined forces with national environmental groups to block the pipeline.

"They have some lawsuits in the works, and they're pretty passionate people," said Paul Seamans, of Draper, S.D., who farms and ranches on land where the pipeline would cross. "I'm putting my hopes in them and the fact that President Obama is environmentally inclined."

Julia Trigg Crawford, the owner of a farm near Paris, Texas, who is in a legal battle with TransCanada over the pipeline, said she was disappointed in the State Department's report but happy to see some acknowledgement that tar sands will do further environmental damage.

"The politicians will throw someone under the bus to get what they want, and last year they threw Oklahoma and Texas under the bus," Crawford said. "I'm hopeful that our neighbors to the north fare better than we did, but...it's not as encouraging as I hoped it would be."

Continued from 1A